



10/02/13

**Testimony Supporting House Bill No. 4649 and 4650. Acts
adopting and enforcing a
Resource Families Bill of Rights Law**

Representative Kurtz and members of the House Family, Children and Seniors Committee:

My name is Marylou Bax and I was a foster parent for the same agency for 34 years. Over those years my husband and I fostered well over 100 children and adopted 13 children from the Michigan child welfare system. Our oldest child is 42 and our youngest is 15. I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Family Enrichment Center and I submit this testimony on behalf of them. The Family Enrichment Center is a parent created, parent driven organization of foster, special need adoptive and kinship families. We provide training, support, resource information and advocacy services to over 300 unique families yearly. Our 2013 budget is \$335,000. All of our funds are raised through community support. A brochure explaining our services is included with this testimony.

I decided to retire from fostering several years ago after a foster care worker called me and very angrily accused me of reporting a case she had to the Foster Care Review Board. She stated that she could not believe I would doubt her decisions or "integrity". She was a good worker and no one had a right to doubt her ability. She said she would personally make sure that no more children would be placed in my home. I listened to her and did not argue. When she was finished ranting I stated that I knew nothing about this case being reported to the Foster Care Review Board and I did not report it. She was adamant that I did and we ended our call with her hanging up. This is the experience that helped me decide it was time to stop fostering. Even if I had reported the case, such a telephone call to a foster parent or anyone who reports concerns to agencies should never have been made. It is because of this experience and the negative, degrading experiences I have witnessed or been told about by the parents the Family Enrichment Center serves that I am here today.

The Family Enrichment Center urges you to support House Bill 4649, "The Resource Family Bill of Rights". Additionally we encourage you to support House Bill No. 4650 which would allow the Children's Ombudsman the ability to investigate violations of the "Resource Family Bill of Rights. We would remind you that it is imperative that both bills be passed. The Resource Family Bill of Rights (4649) would be useless without House Bill 4650.

In the past year The Michigan Department of Human Services has invested much time and money into recruiting new foster parents. This mass recruitment effort was a condition of the Children's Right's Law Suit. The Family Enrichment Center proudly congratulates DHS on their recruitment success.

However, now the REAL work must begin. DHS must now retain these new parents.

The Passage of the Resource Family Bill of Rights and its accompanying bill 4650 could very well be the greatest retention activity our state could ever initiate.

Social work researchers, Ramona Denby, Nolan Rindfleisch, and Gerald Bean, have concluded that sharing of information and mutual respect is intimately related to foster parent satisfaction: Denby, Rindfleisch, and Bean, explain that when foster parents are seen as ancillary help, foster parents feel unappreciated and unsupported, and are less likely to continue fostering. However, when the foster parent and agency relationship is characterized by sharing of information, and respect, foster parents are satisfied with their relationship with their agency social workers and other agency personnel.*

Most of the concepts contained in House Bill 4649 like treating foster parents with respect, involving them in case-planning, sharing information regarding the children in their care and providing appropriate training, not retaliating against foster parents—are not controversial. Furthermore, most, if not all, fall within current department policy or legislation, if not always practiced. However, we believe that this legislation is a positive addition because it collects all of these policies and laws and puts them in one place. Even more important, it indicates to foster parents that the legislature recognizes their contributions as valued members of a foster child's treatment team.

I end this testimony with 2 requests:

1. Again, please endorse House bill 4649 and House bill 4650
2. Please look at the great retention work that parent to parent groups such as the Family Enrichment Center, Families on the Move, MAFAK and the Family Support Network and consider advocating for the appropriation of state funds to support their retention efforts.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

Respectfully,

Marylou Bax, Executive Director
Family Enrichment Center

*Denby, Ramona, Nolan Rindfleisch, and Gerald Bean. "Predictors of Foster Parents' Satisfaction and Intent to Continue to Foster" *Child Abuse & Neglect* vol. 23, No. 3, 1999 p.300